

 GUIDE

Leveraging Your Hotel's Online Reputation to Drive Sales Leads & Close Business



INDEX

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Online Reputation and the Hotel Sales Function | 5 |
| How Decision-makers Use Online Reviews | 9 |
| Using Guest Feedback Data as a Sales Tool | 14 |
| Summary | 21 |
| About ReviewPro | 24 |
| What We Do | 25 |

■ INTRODUCTION

Online reputation management is typically thought of as a marketing and operations function in hotels, but it has important applications in the sales department too.

For any successful sales team, bringing in group and volume business is critical to meeting and exceeding sales goals. The ability of a hotel to attract and secure this type of business depends in part on its online



reputation. A hotel's online reputation is shaped the reviews and ratings posted by guests on TripAdvisor, Google, online travel agencies, Facebook and other review sources.

Much like individual travelers check out reviews when planning trips, meeting planners, event organizers and corporate travel managers check out reviews too. For many of these decision-makers, a hotel's reputation is as important as its location, pricing, service and amenities.

Given the amount of revenue at stake, it's imperative that sales staff work closely with marketing, operations and revenue management to ensure that reviews and ratings paint an accurate and appealing portrait of the property.

And yet while sales staff generally recognize the importance of online reputation, in many hotels the sales department has little or no involvement in the reputation management process. Moreover, many sales staff do not have access to the data they need to understand the hotel's positioning relative to competitors and to convince clients to choose their hotel.

REVIEW DATA AS A SALES TOOL

The use of review data as a sales tool is a relatively new and emerging trend in the hotel industry. It presents a unique opportunity for hotels to get a step ahead of competitors.

In this guide, we discuss how to integrate reputation management practices and guest feedback data into the sales process at your hotel.

We focus on finding answers to three key questions:

- How can online reviews and reputation be used as a sales tool?
- How do key decision-makers use reviews?
- How can hotels use guest feedback data as part of the sales function?

By taking a focused and strategic approach to the management of guest feedback — or, as we call it at ReviewPro, guest intelligence — your hotel can attract more sales leads, win more contracts and increase guest satisfaction among groups, events and high-volume business.

ONLINE REPUTATION AND THE HOTEL SALES FUNCTION

THE HOTEL SALES DEPARTMENT

The sales department performs a unique and vital function in hotels: selling volume business. This includes groups, meetings, events, corporate accounts and wholesale tour business. Without volume business to provide a base of occupied rooms, hotels would have a difficult time selling out, optimizing room rates and generating incremental revenue.

The responsibilities of the sales department can be divided into two main functions: selling and servicing. On the selling side, depending on the size of the hotel, the sales department may consist of one individual — the sales manager — or numerous individuals. Typical sales roles in larger properties include the director of sales and marketing, sales managers, catering sales

managers and sales coordinators. Hotels that belong to a brand or group may also have offsite regional and corporate sales staff. On the servicing side, roles in the sales department may include the director of conference services, group services managers, catering managers, assistants and coordinators.

Sales activities include prospecting for new business, preparing proposals, negotiating contracts, developing relationships with clients and soliciting repeat business. Servicing activities include working with clients to prepare for group arrivals and events, liaising with other departments, and taking care of groups and events while on property.

REPUTATION, DEMAND AND PRICING POWER

As we know from Cornell University's Center for Hospitality Research, a positive online reputation has a direct impact on a hotel's average rate, occupancy and RevPAR. (The Impact of Social Media on Lodging Performance, 2012.) To measure reputation, Cornell used ReviewPro's Global Review Index™ (GRI), an on-line reputation score derived from review data collected from all major review sources worldwide.

The research has important ramifications for the sales department. As author Chris Anderson remarked, "What was remarkable about the study is that positive online reputation doesn't merely provide higher pricing power for online sales. It is correlated to higher group booking rates and corporate negotiated rates in addition to reservations made over the phone."

A 1 point increase in a hotel's Global Review Index™ equals up to:

+0.89%
in ADR

+0.54%
in Occupancy

+1.42%
in RevPAR

Budget & Midscale

+0.1 ▶ **+\$1.10**
TA score RevPar

Upper Midscale

+0.1 ▶ **+\$1.90**
TA score RevPar

Upscale & Luxury

+0.1 ▶ **+\$8.40**
TA score RevPar

Given the power of a positive reputation, close cooperation and communication between the sales and operations departments is essential. Sales staff must set realistic expectations of the experiences a hotel provides, and operations staff must be trained, empowered and

USING ONLINE REVIEWS AS A SALES TOOL

In researching this guide, we found that while many hoteliers acknowledge the importance of reputation to the sales function, few are actively using online reviews to their full potential as a sales tool. This provides an opportunity for hotels that wish to get a jump start on the competition.

1) Testimonials.

Consumers tend to be wary of advertising and sales messaging, especially if they are not familiar with the brand or the sales representative. They have more trust in information and advice from other consumers, who are considered less biased. For this reason, online reviews are powerful as testimonials from real guests. When guests love a hotel, they become an extension of its sales team.

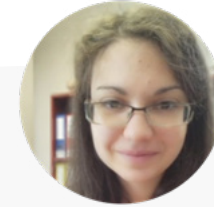


2) Guest Intelligence.

Online reviews and guest surveys are a valuable source of guest intelligence, providing feedback on why guests choose a hotel, what they liked and disliked, and why they will (or won't) come back. Feedback from guests of meetings, conferences, events and tour groups can help sales managers tailor their pitches and know which strengths to emphasize in sales collateral, proposals and communications.

3) Competitive Insights.

By reading reviews of competitors and comparing performance, sales staff gain critical insight into their property's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relative to competitors—known as a SWOT analysis. This information can be used to position the hotel against competitors to win business.



Bernadett Kosztka
The Three Corners Hotels

With review information, we can highlight our strengths and weaknesses. Strengths that we can emphasize in meetings with tour operators and corporate partners, or in content on our website and social media channels. And weaknesses that we have to work on to get better and better.

HOW DECISION-MAKERS USE ONLINE REVIEWS

DO YOUR CLIENTS CHECK OUT REVIEWS?

Of the group organizers and travel managers we interviewed for this guide, most said they consult online reviews at least at one stage in the process of searching for, vetting and selecting hotels. Many consider a hotel's online reputation to be as important as factors like location, pricing, amenities and relationships with sales staff.

A hotel director of sales commented that she knows that prospective clients check out reviews because they sometimes ask about the comments they read. This provides the hotel with a valuable opportunity to explain the situation and reassure the organizer that the same thing won't happen to them.



But sales staff do not always have the opportunity to address comments directly. If a prospect checks out reviews before contacting a hotel and finds negative comments, he or she may decide to strike the hotel from their list. Hotel staff won't even know they were being considered.

However, if the hotel has posted a management response to the review, it may have a similar effect of reassuring the organizer. For this reason, posting prompt, thoughtful management responses to reviews can be highly valuable to the sales department. This is particularly true of reviews from groups, tours and events.

On the other hand, if the organizer finds rave reviews and high ratings on review sites, there's a far better chance he or she will contact the hotel and request a proposal.

Groups, Meetings and Events

Checking out reviews is a critical part of due diligence for meeting planners because their own reputation is on the line. They want to be confident they are choosing the right hotel and that attendees will be happy with the choice.

"Today, I think all meeting planners and corporate bookers like to ensure that their proposed venues are well run and offer a consistent level of service so they do not let their clients down or get surprised later on,"

said James Hewitson, general manager of Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara, Oman, in our survey.

WHOLESALE TOUR BUSINESS AND CORPORATE TRAVEL

Reviews are a vital source of information for many corporate travel managers too. "Having been with Sony for 15 years, my reputation on which hotels I select in the program is very important," said Ray Foley, administrator of Sony Pictures Entertainment Global Hotel Program.

"I start with close relationships with a handful of buyers from different industries, and then I check with TripAdvisor to see what [travelers] are saying about the properties." The same applies for tour operators and wholesalers.

"More and more, online reputation acts as a sales channel," said Montse González i Collet, director of sales at Aqua Hotel. "Increasingly, groups and tour operators

first look at the reputation online and then study the price. Some tour operators won't contract a hotel if it doesn't have an acceptable rating."

Some tour operators also use reviews as a tool when negotiating rates and contracts with hotels. "We are in a destination based on tour operators' business, with over 300 hotels competing on the same market share," said Ghada Amin, communications manager at Orascom Hotel Management. "Tour operators have started using hotel rankings and reviews when positioning hotels and negotiating rates."



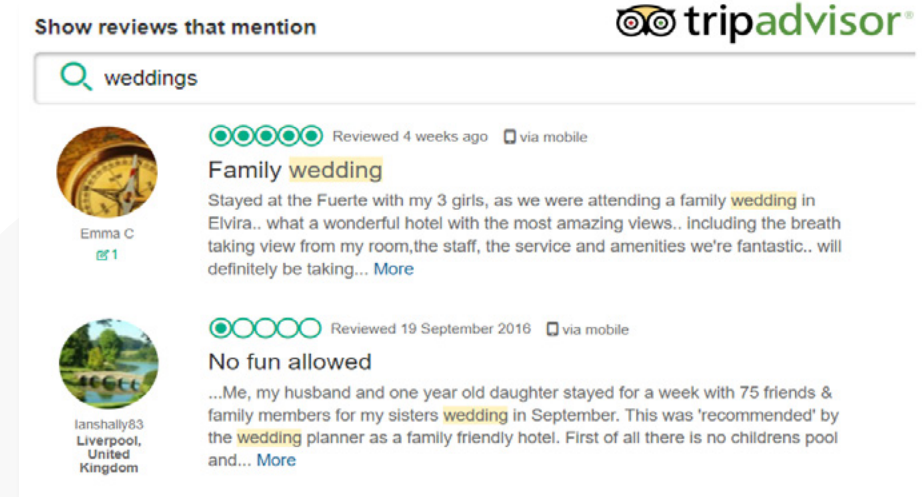
WHICH REVIEW SOURCES DO DECISION-MAKERS CONSULT?

Of the meeting planners and travel managers we consulted, most mentioned TripAdvisor as their go-to site for traveler reviews. Others cited Google and Facebook, and in some regions Cvent, WeddingWire and EventWire are popular too.

"Our clients frequently check out TripAdvisor to see what 'real guests' have to say about a property,"

said Bronwyn Slade, director of program sales and development at Pacific Destination Services, a destination management company.

"As we've all heard, a bad review can be extremely damaging."



Some planners simply enter the hotel's name in Google or another search engine to see what comes up. Star ratings from TripAdvisor, Google and online travel agencies usually appear within the first few search results, providing a snapshot of the hotel's online reputation.

SEARCHING REVIEWS ON TRIPADVISOR

Did you know that reviews are searchable on TripAdvisor? Users can simply go to your hotel's page, scroll down to the search window entitled "Show reviews that mention," and enter any search term to scan related review comments.

For example, a wedding planner can enter "wedding" in the search window to see all the reviews of your hotel that mention weddings. Similarly, a meeting planner can search "meetings" to see reviews that mention meetings at your hotel.

If a planner is considering three hotels, and one hotel has a review entitled "Worst meeting ever," another hotel has a review entitled "Mixed experienced," and the third has a review entitled "Best meeting ever," which hotel do you think the planner is most likely to choose?



FREE DEMO

Happy Guests. Profitable Hotels.

Comprised of our industry-leading Online Reputation Management (ORM), Guest Satisfaction Surveys (GSS) and Mobile App, the Guest Intelligence Suite helps your organization to develop a truly guest-centric culture.

Discover today how this highly flexible solution can help you turn insight into action to improve operational and service excellence, while driving revenue

Request Demo >>

USING GUEST FEEDBACK DATA AS A SALES TOOL

Here are some ReviewPro tips and insights for making the most of guest intelligence—data from online reviews and guest surveys—as a sales tool.

LEVERAGING REVIEW DATA DURING THE SALES PROCESS

When it comes to using guest feedback data in the sales department, there are five main areas to focus on:

1. Attracting sales leads
2. Closing sales deals
3. Ensuring clients are happy
4. Following up with clients
5. Encouraging brand loyalty and advocacy

Categories ?

Best

Worst

| | Mentions | Positive % |
|----------|----------|------------|
| Location | 6979 | 92% |
| Staff | 7762 | 89% |
| Ambience | 2123 | 86% |
| Hotel | 20034 | 84% |
| Beach | 2181 | 84% |

Concepts ?

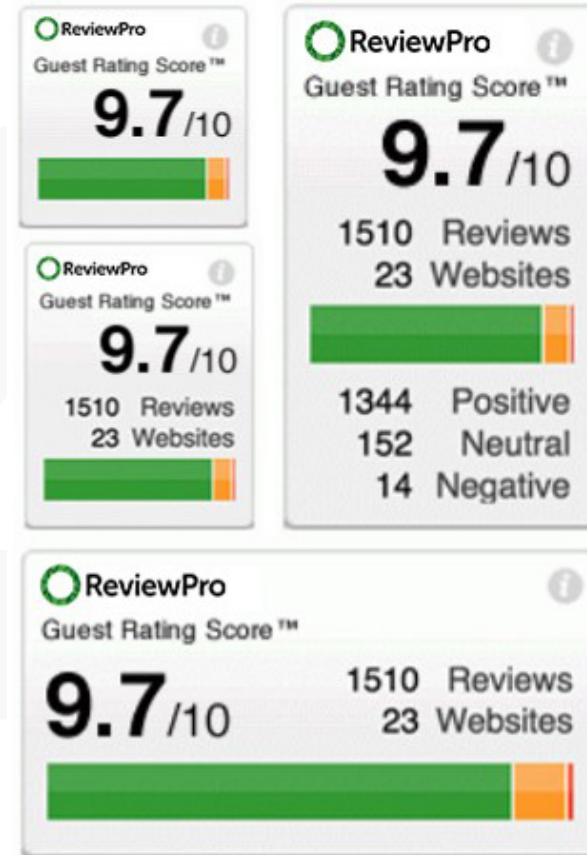
↑ Trending Up

| | Mentions | Change |
|------------------------|----------|--------|
| dance in Entertainment | 34 | +92% |
| sea in Beach | 252 | +88% |
| shop in Facilities | 146 | +87% |
| setting in Location | 40 | +87% |
| roof in Room | 111 | +82% |

CREATE THE STRONGEST SALES MESSAGES POSSIBLE

By using ReviewPro to track and analyze reviews and surveys, you can identify what guests say your hotel does best—and where there is room for improvement. You can break down performance by category or concept and use sentiment analysis to identify trends and patterns.

ReviewPro's competitive benchmarking tools will also give you a better understanding of your hotel's unique selling propositions relative to competitors. These strengths can be used in sales materials and communications with prospective clients to convince them to choose your hotel over your competitors.



USE TESTIMONIALS FROM HAPPY CLIENTS

With ReviewPro, you can publish content and widgets featuring guest reviews, ratings and survey comments on your hotel's website. You can also extract positive comments from corporate clients and event attendees and use them as testimonials on your website and in sales collateral. This will help attract prospective clients and reassure them that your hotel is the right choice.



Using guest feedback data as a sales tool

REINFORCE SALES NEGOTIATIONS & RFPS

As we have discussed, meeting organizers, corporate travel planners and tour operators check out reviews on TripAdvisor and other review sources as part of the hotel vetting process. But they don't have access to the wealth of review data provided by ReviewPro, which collects reviews and ratings from 200+ review sources worldwide.

As a ReviewPro user, you can prepare reports that show the high level of guest satisfaction at your hotel relative to competitors and share them with clients and prospects. By explaining that the data provides a broad overview of your hotel's performance from the perspective of travelers, you can build a case for your hotel.

You can also provide a breakdown of review data based on features that are important to the client such as service, cleanliness and room quality. This information can be used as an effective negotiating tool and to reinforce your quality, consistency and value.



Using guest feedback data as a sales tool

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

Recently, a ReviewPro client told us about a situation they encountered that is all too common in hotels. After the hotel submitted a bid on a group meeting, the organizer came back to the sales manager to ask for a lower room rate, pointing out that the hotel's rate was higher than the rates quoted by other hotels under consideration.

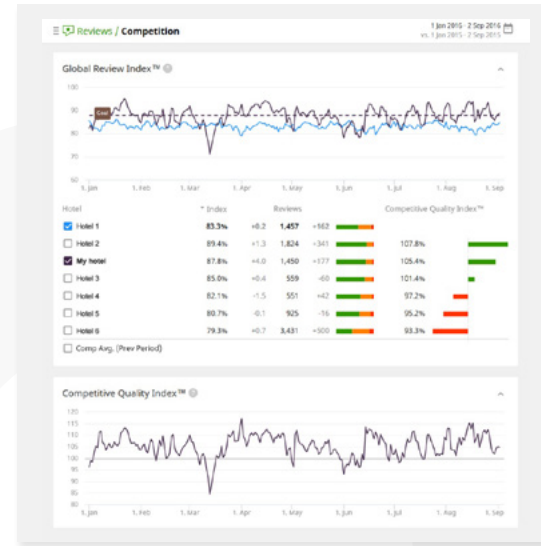
Hotel management felt that the higher rate was fair and justified given that the hotel outperformed all of the other hotels in guest satisfaction scores. To support this position, the sales manager printed a ReviewPro report that demonstrated the hotel's high Global Review Index relative to competitor hotels and forwarded it to the organizer, along with an explanation of how the GRI is calculated.

The argument was enough to convince the organizer to choose the hotel and to accept the rate as quoted. Moreover, the organizer committed to booking the hotel for the same conference the following year too.

It's an example of how review data can be used as a powerful negotiating tool. As the sales manager remarked, "Reputation really does strengthen the rate argument."

SURVEYS FOR WEDDING AND CONFERENCE BOOKINGS

Did you know that ReviewPro's Guest Satisfaction Surveys allow you to create special surveys with questions tailored to different clients? For example, you can create a survey for wedding planners or conference organizers.



Customized surveys allow you to ask specific questions and obtain the information you need to attract more group bookings. You can also ask for opinions on ideas, new services and concepts you are considering to trial.

FOCUS ON KEY CORPORATE ACCOUNTS

To ensure a high level of satisfaction of guests from key corporate accounts, you can import PMS data into the Guest Surveys tool and create a dedicated view for each company. You can also automate weekly and monthly reporting for specific corporate accounts.

"Our conference and incentive staff employ our post-stay survey (the one specific for conference guests) to review the quality of the services we provide our guests. We put a lot of effort to tease as many clues as we can out of the comments and ratings to improve our services."

said Bruno Saragat, inventory supervisor at Forte Village Resort.

A distinct advantage for corporate sales managers is the ability to set up real-time alerts in the event that a corporate guest indicates dissatisfaction. This enables the sales manager to follow up promptly and ensure that issues are resolved before feedback reaches head office and jeopardizes the account.

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT FOR YOUR SALES TEAM

In ReviewPro you can filter reviews according to whether they are positive, negative or neutral. You can also filter reviews by language, source and department. To extract customized metrics related to sales, you can create keywords to search reviews specific to events, weddings and conferences, drawing insight from up to three years of historical data.

Alerts and reports will help keep your sales and operations departments informed and focused on key action items and areas where improvements are required. This will help encourage sales staff to take responsibility for guest satisfaction related to the accounts they manage.

Review data also provides key insights for sales staff when negotiating with current and potential clients and tour operators. For example, if reviews indicate that your German guests are extremely happy and love your breakfast, this information can be used to convince other German wholesalers to feature your hotel in their program too.

RESPONDING TO REVIEWS

By responding to reviews, hotel managers show that they are listening to guest feedback and care about guest satisfaction. Review responses provide an opportunity to reinforce strengths and, in the event of negative feedback, change perceptions and reassure sales prospects. Be sure to maintain clarity and consistency in sales and brand messaging in review responses.

"Our sales execs are encouraged to filter survey responses by company (PMS data) to assist with negotiations and sales account management,"

says Nadine Lee, group guest services manager at glh Hotels.

I SUMMARY

ESSENTIALS OF ORM

Using guest intelligence as a sales tool brings us back to the four fundamental steps to building and leverage a positive online reputation:



- 1. Listen**
Closely monitor feedback from group and corporate organizers and guests.
- 2. Act**
Share feedback with staff and use it to guide improvements.
- 3. Respond**
Reply to guest feedback, especially related to meetings, events and key accounts.
- 4. Earn**
Treat every group and event like it's the most important for your hotel, and the rave reviews will follow.

LEVERAGING REPUTATION AS A SALES TOOL

Moving beyond the basics, there are many more ways to build and leverage reputation, including:

- Strive for consistency in messaging so that sales, marketing and reservations give similar descriptions and information, thereby setting accurate and realistic expectations of the experiences you provide.
- Prevent group review attacks by checking in regularly with groups while they are in house and acting quickly to resolve issues. Weddings in particular require extra attention because emotions run high on such a special occasion. Ensure that staff are alert to any signs of trouble and empowered to resolve issues before they escalate.
- Ask organizers to submit reviews and surveys, and encourage them to ask their participants to do so too.
- Share relevant reviews, surveys and guest satisfaction scores in sales meetings to ensure that sales staff are aware of performance relative to competitors and are playing their part in advancing objectives.
- Compare reviews with competitors to identify key selling points and how to position your hotel.
- Use reviews, review scores and data as testimonials on your website, in sales collateral, in proposals and negotiations.

"Our sales teams actively use recent reviews and recommendations as part of their sales decks," said Stephen Williams, director of sales & marketing at Windward Management. "All major proposals [are] accompanied by referrals from similar events/ organizations. Reviews are used at high level ownership/ investment meeting to sometimes justify investment in either product or equipment."

Williams shares some valuable advice for hotel sales staff. "Use the positives, be aware of the negatives, conduct ongoing SWOT analyses and comp set analyses to ensure your product is fit for purpose. Use real life examples of negatives to implement improvements. Thank the hotel team members who are mentioned in positive reviews as they make the sales effort easier."



ABOUT REVIEWPRO

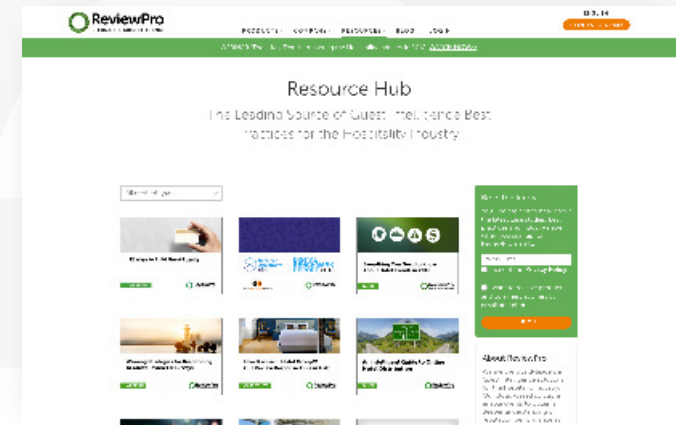
ReviewPro is the world leader in Guest Intelligence solutions, with more than 40,000 hotels in 150 countries. ReviewPro's Global Review Index™ (GRI), the industry-standard online reputation score, is based on review data collected from 200+ OTAs and review sites in 75+ languages.

The company's cloud-based Guest Experience Improvement Suite™ includes Online Reputation Management, Guest Satisfaction Surveys, Auto Case Management, and an innovative Guest Messaging Hub.

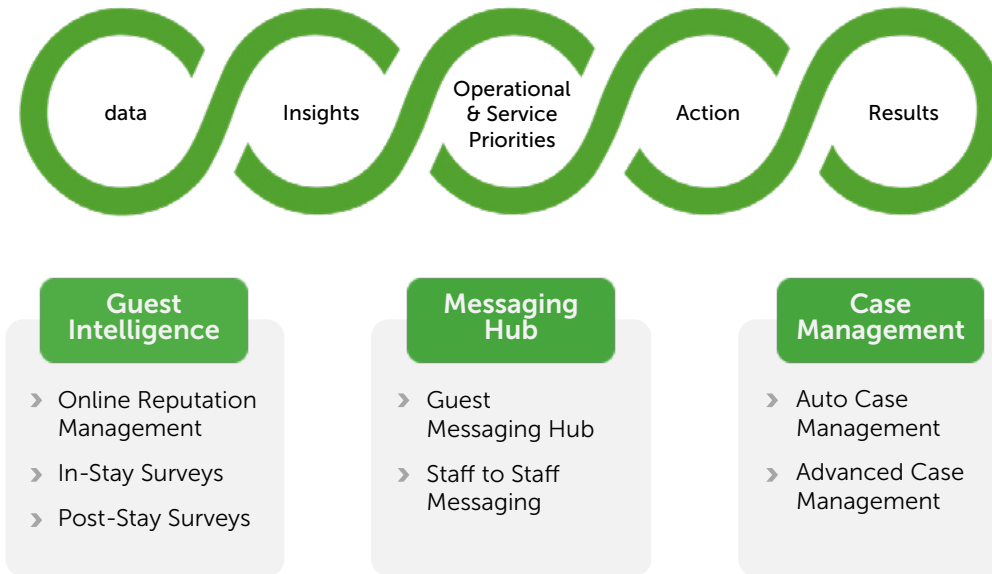
The tools and processes that ReviewPro provides enable clients to prioritize operational/service improvements to deliver better guest experiences and increase guest satisfaction, online rankings, and revenue.

Visit our Resource Hub

The leading source of Guest Intelligence best practices and insights for the hospitality industry



WHAT WE DO





www.reviewpro.com
info@reviewpro.com
[@ReviewPro](https://www.instagram.com/ReviewPro)